

Nostradamus

By James K. Walker

Date of Birth: December 14, 1503

Date of Death: July 1, 1566

Practices: herbalist, apothecary, medical doctor, astrology, author of prophecies.

Publications: *Les Propheties* (The Prophecies), various Prognostications and annual Almanacs.

INTRODUCTION

Michel de *Nostredame* (Latin: Nostradamus) was a sixteenth century medical doctor, astrologer, and author born in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence in southern France. His Jewish family become Catholic around 1455 when his grandfather, Guy Gassonet, converted to Catholicism and changed his name to Pierre Nostredame. Nostradamus studied medicine at an early age and authored at least two medical books. One was a loose translation into French of some of the writings of Galen of Pergamum, a 2nd century Greek physician and philosopher.¹ The other was a medical cookbook with recipes for preparing apothecary cures and cosmetics.² Nostradamus is best known, however, for his astrological and prophetic books which were popular in his own day and continue to be for over 400 years.

HISTORY

Nostradamus' foray into prophecy began in earnest at the age of 47 when he wrote an almanac containing predictions for the year 1550. This book enjoyed some popularity and, encouraged by its success, he began publishing additional almanacs – at least one annually until his death. In 1555, Nostradamus published the first edition of his most famous work, *Les Propheties*,³ containing obscure, vaguely-worded predictions in a four-verse poetic style called quatrains. The quatrains were published in stages arranged in groups of 100 verses known as “centuries.” The final edition, published posthumously in 1568, contains ten centuries with 942 quatrains. Century 7 contains only 42 quatrains as 58 are missing and apparently were never published in any extant edition.

Proponents of Nostradamus both in print and on the web claim that his quatrains accurately predicted scores of future events. These include the date of his own death, the jousting death of King Henry II, the deaths of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette, Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, World War I, Hitler's rise and World War II, the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and much more.⁴ Careful evaluation of the evidence combined with recent historical scholarship, however, has cast major doubts on the accuracy of both his prophecies and many of the remarkable claims that have been made about his life story.

Much has been published about Nostradamus' fascinating background. He is said to have been educated by his grandfathers who were physicians to the court of René of Anjou and earned both bachelors and doctor of medicine degrees from Montpellier University where he later taught as a professor. Biographers recount that he had successfully cured the Plague at Aix-en-Provence and elsewhere and in 1556 was summoned to Paris by Queen Catherine de' Medici to explain his prediction (quatrain 1:35) that her husband King Henry II would be killed.

He is said to have even predicted his own exhumation. When his body was dug up to be moved, his skeleton was wearing a medallion bearing the exact year of his disinterment, 1700.⁵ These and many other biographical claims, however, have been completely disproven or seriously discounted by new scholarship⁶ based on recently-published archival documents written during his lifetime, private correspondence, and first editions.

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Apparently, Nostradamus never earned a doctorate to practice medicine but was actually expelled from the University of Montpellier⁷ when it was discovered that he had been an apothecary, a practice banned by the university. Claims that he cured the Plague have also been debunked. To treat the disease, Nostradamus was said to have plucked thousands of rose petals that he would dry and crush to form the main ingredient for his antidote which he called “rose pills.” These pills, which also included sawdust from green Cyprus, cloves, etc. were given to his patients as lozenges to be placed under the tongue. John Hogue, author of *Nostradamus & the Millennium*, claims that this concoction along with a low fat diet and moderate exercise, “helped most of his patients respond to the rose pills’ strong doses of vitamin C. These ‘rose pills’ successfully cured the cities of Aix and Salon” of the plague.⁸ As James Randi, a leading skeptic of Nostradamus has pointed out, the amount of vitamin C in rose petals would be negligible and neither vitamin C nor any other ingredient of the “rose pills” would have any effect on the Plague.⁹

THE PROPHECIES

Fans of the prophet and scores of Nostradamus “experts” cite scores of examples of fulfilled prophecies in hundreds of books, periodicals, blogs and websites.¹⁰ In each case, however, there is compelling evidence that these amazing predictions were either forged after the fact, poorly (often deliberately) mistranslated, or just so vague that they could just as easily be twisted into a description of a half dozen other events that occurred before or after Nostradamus wrote the predictions. In his critique, *The Mask of Nostradamus*, James Randi developed a classification system for the quatrains dividing the verses into six categories:

Quatrains of the First Kind (Q1K): Undated, open-ended prophecies that can not technically be counted as failures because they are not tied to a specific person, time, or date.

Quatrains of the Second Kind (Q2K): High percentage predictions that were very likely to happen given the historical and political situations of which Nostradamus was naturally aware.

Quatrains of the Third Kind (Q3K): Postdated prophecies that were actually recorded soon after the events had already occurred. Q3K would also include quatrains authored by Nostradamus and some which are known to have been edited after the fact or in some cases forged after his death.

Quatrains of the Fourth Kind (Q4K): Nonsensical verses that are so semantically and/or logically convoluted to have no discernable meaning.

Quatrains of the Fourth Kind (Q5K): Descriptions of well-know people, common places, and events that had already happened and were common knowledge in his day.

Quatrains of the Wrong Kind (QWK): Predictions that have clearly failed ether during Nostradamus’ time or subsequently.¹¹

Randi identified the top ten quatrains that the prophet’s promoters, whom Randi calls “Nostradamians,” most often cite as irrefutable evidence of fulfilled prophecy. Randi provides compelling evidence that each of the predictions clearly fall into one of the six categories utterly failing to vindicate the prophet. For example, quatrain 2:24 mentions “Hister” and “de Germaine,” which Nostradamians argue is a prophecy of Adolph Hitler (Hister sound like Hitler) in Germany. Randi makes a solid case that this is actually a Q5K and logically cannot be twisted into a reference to the German Fuehrer. Long before Nostradamus’ time, the lower area of the Danube River was called Ister or Hister. From the 12th to the 16th century “de germain” meant “brother” or “near relative.” “The word ‘German’ came to be used in France only after World War II, to mean an inhabitant of Germany.”¹² Thus, this famous “Hitler” quatrain is actually a reference to the lower Danube River and a “child brother.”

As the ten predictions refuted by Randi are the *best* examples of prophecies, it is logical that the others could be just as easily dismissed as Q1-Q5K with the proper historical, textual, and linguistic research.

Failed Prophecies

It is also important to take into account QWK (failed predictions). Nostradamians always prefer to try to find quatrains that seem to match an historical event *after* the event happens. Whenever they try to interpret the quatrains to make predictions before the fact, their track record is remarkably dismal. Here are just a few examples:

May, 1988 Failure: The 1981 film about Nostradamus, *The Man Who Saw Tomorrow* narrated by Orson Welles, included a reference to quatrain 10:67 that was interpreted to be a prophecy of a coming catastrophic earthquake that would strike Los Angeles.¹³ Other Nostradamus experts pinpointed May, 1988 for the calamity prompting an *ABC Evening News*¹⁴ story documenting earthquake preparations and widespread concerns among some Los Angeles residents. Los Angeles experienced no earthquake in 1988. There was a major earthquake in San Francisco in 1989 but that was at the wrong place and the wrong time.

July, 1999 Failure: Nostradamus' predictions are "very very wrong" according to Randi who explained the majority of his prophecies, "are easily explained in matters of his own day. He made 104 verifiable predictions in which he actually named a place or a person or a time. He's been wrong on 103 of the 104.... We'll have to wait to see if he has a perfect record."¹⁵ In this July 3, 1999 interview, Randi was referring quatrain 10:72, which is perhaps the most date-specific prophecy of Nostradamus ever recorded:

"In the year 1999 and seven months,
From the skies shall come an alarmingly powerful king,
To raise again the great King of the Jacquerie
Before and after, Mars shall reign at will."¹⁶

There was much publicized warning from Nostradamus experts of a coming apocalypse by the end of July, 1999. This generated a good deal of public fear and in some cases panic – especially in Japan.¹⁷ Yet despite the fact that it contained the clearest actual date for any Nostradamus prediction, the prophecy failed – nothing materialized.

September 11, 2001 Failure: In her book, *The Further Prophecies of Nostradamus: 1985 and Beyond*, Erica Cheetham predicts an attack on New York city based on quatrain 6:97. Rather than seeing it as a clear warning of the 9/11 hijackers, however, Cheetham interprets the quatrain as an attack through "both bombs and chemical warfare.... Covering both the state and the new city and the scattered flame may well be that of a nuclear holocaust."¹⁸ Cheetham failed to identify the date of the terrorist attack, the perpetrators, motive, or specific targets.

Some Nostradamians cited a much more remarkable and detailed prophecy of the 9/11 attacks – specifically the airliners hitting the New York Trade Center towers. Almost immediately after the tragedy, people began circulating emails quoting quatrain 6:97's prediction that "Two steel birds will fall from the sky on the Metropolis" and that the "two brothers" (towers?) will be torn apart while "the fortress" (Pentagon?) endures.¹⁹

The problem is that this prophecy is a fake. Quatrain 6:97 says no such thing²⁰ and Nostradamus never made the prediction. It is a Q3K forgery. What quatrain 6:97 actually says is that that "the sky will burn at 45 degrees" above "the great new city." Nostradamians like Erica Cheetham have reported that New York City is near the 45 latitude, but so are the "new" cities of Chicago, Minneapolis, San Francisco as well as Bucharest, Belgrade, Rome, Paris and Madrid²¹ for that matter. There is no mention of steel birds falling from the sky in any Nostradamus quatrain.

At best, quatrain 6:97 could be interpreted to predict that at some time in the future there would be a fire at or "near" a great new city involving "the heaven" burning at 45 degrees (latitude, longitude, or temperature?). Of course, fires happen in large cities all the time. Before the 9/11 terrorist attacks, no one interpreted this as applying to the World Trade Center, hijackers, or airplanes.

December 21, 2012 Failure: More recently, Nostradamians have pointed to 2012²² as the end of the world as we know it based once again on loose interpretations of vague quatrains (including 2:72 again!) and the claim that the Mayan calendar²³ runs out on that date. If all 104 verifiable prophecies connected to Nostradamus failed as of July, 1999,²⁴ one should reasonably expect a similar result with this latest prediction.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

Not even the most avid Nostradamian can extract anything of prophetic value (or even a coherent thought) from the vast majority of the quatrains. The few examples that are touted as accurate predictions are so obscure that they could be interpreted to mean almost anything. In some cases they are purposely mistranslated or are outright forgeries written after the fact. One of the few quatrains citing an actual date (July, 1999) resulted in a spectacular and embarrassing failure.

With hundreds of quatrains that can be interpreted thousands of ways, one may expect that statistically Nostradamus should get a few hits. Nevertheless, he dramatically fails the biblical test for a prophet which is 100% accuracy (Deut. 18:20-22). The predictions of Nostradamus were based on astrology²⁵ whereas the Bible clearly warns against trusting in prophecies based on “astrologers, the stargazers, [and] the monthly prognosticators” (Isa. 47:13). Divination, which includes astrology and any other methodology for acquiring supernatural knowledge apart from God and His Word, is clearly forbidden in the scriptures (Lev. 19:26; Ezek. 13:20-23).

In times of uncertainty and trials, it is natural for people to experience apprehension and insecurity. With such feelings come the temptation to turn to the occult and divination to alleviate those fears. God alone knows the future (Isa. 41:23) and He asks His people to trust Him (Prov. 3:1-7). Those seeking to discover the future through divination, psychics, or astrologers such as Nostradamus have succumbed to a temptation and are displaying a lack of trust in God and the sufficiency of His Word.

Notes

- ¹ Nostradamus, *Paraphrase de C. GALIEN, sus l'Exhortation de Menodote aux études des bonnes Artz, mesmement Medicine.*
- ² Nostradamus, *Traité des fardemens et confitures*, 1555.
- ³ A free online edition of *Les Propheties*, translated into English by Edgar Leoni is available here: http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Les_Propheties and a French text with a different English translation is available here: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/nos/index.htm> (accessed Oct. 7, 2009).
- ⁴ John Hogue, *The HogueProphecy Bulletin*, <http://hogueprophecy.com> and David Wallechinsky and Irving Wallace, “Predictions of Nostradamus or Michel de Nostredame” (<http://www.trivia-library.com/a/predictions-of-nostradamus-or-michel-de-nostredame.htm>) (accessed Oct. 22, 2009).
- ⁵ See Quatrain 9:7. One source of this rumor is John Hogue, *Nostradamus: The New Revelations* (Longmead, UK: Element Books Ltd., 1997). These and similar claims are often repeated and embellished. See: “Desecration of the Tomb of Nostradamus” <http://www.dreamscape.com/morgana/desecrat.htm> (accessed Oct. 15, 2009).
- ⁶ Peter Lemesurier, *The Unknown Nostradamus* (Alresford, Hants., UK: John Hunt Publishing, 2003).
- ⁷ The expulsion document (BIU Montpellier, Register S 2 folio 87) still exists in the faculty library although Nostradamus was called “doctor” by some of his contemporaries. See “Nostradamus,” *Skeptical World*, <http://www.skepticalworld.com/hidden-mysteries/nostradamus.asp> (accessed Oct. 22, 2009).
- ⁸ John Hogue, *Nostradamus & the Millennium* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1987) 13.
- ⁹ James Randi, *The Mask of Nostradamus* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1993), 168-69.
- ¹⁰ A current key word search of “Nostradamus” on Amazon.com produces a list of 7,728 items.
- ¹¹ James Randi, *The Mask of Nostradamus*, 146.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 214.
- ¹³ Paul Bringle, “A non-moving experience,” *The Dallas Morning News*, May 15, 1988, H-2.
- ¹⁴ “California / Earthquake / Nostradamus Prediction,” ABC Evening News for Monday, May 9, 1988. Vanderbilt Television News Archive <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=116081> (accessed Oct. 22, 2009).
- ¹⁵ Rich Miller, “Deadline draws near for Nostradamus prophecy,” *The Dallas Morning News*, July 3, 1999, 4-E.
- ¹⁶ Henry C. Roberts, *The Complete Prophecies of Nostradamus* (Great Neck, NY: Nostradamus, Inc. 1947), 336. This Quatrain may be an example of Nostradamus’ usage of vague references to contemporary historical events in order to recycle them as future speculations. The phrase “great King of the Jaquerie” has often been mistranslated “great King of Terror” or “great King of the Mongols.” The actual French phrase, “*Roy d’Angolmois*,” is most likely a simple reference to the King (*Roy*) of France, Francis I, who was also called *François d’Angoulême*. Francis I died in March of 1547 when Nostradamus was age 44.
- ¹⁷ Rich Miller, “Deadline draws near for Nostradamus prophecy.”
- ¹⁸ Erica Cheatham, *The Further Prophecies of Nostradamus: 1985 and Beyond* (Perigee Books: New York, 1985), 194-95. The 1981 Orson Welles movie, *The Man Who Saw Tomorrow*, was based largely on Cheatham’s earlier work which has also been largely discredited by recent scholarship. See: Brian Dunning, “The Greatest Secret of Nostradamus,” *Septoid* #66, Sept., 18, 2007 <http://skeptoid.com/episodes/4066> (accessed Oct. 22, 2009).
- ¹⁹ David Emery, “Did Nostradamus Predict the 9/11 Attacks?” (About.com: Urban Legends) <http://urbanlegends.about.com/cs/historical/a/nostradamus.htm> (accessed Oct. 9, 2009). See also “False Prophecy” <http://www.snopes.com/rumors/nostradamus.asp> (accessed Oct. 9, 2009).
- ²⁰ Henry C. Roberts, *The Complete Prophecies of Nostradamus* (NY: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1994), 211. (This edition with revised commentary was reedited by Lee Roberts Amsterdam and Harvey Amsterdam then updated by Robert Lawrence.)
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² See Marie D. Jones, *2013: The End of Days or a New Beginning* (Franklin Lakes, New Jersey: The Career Press, Inc., 2008) and the 2009 television documentary, *Nostradamus 2012* which aired on the History Chanel and is available on DVD.
- ²³ Watchman Fellowship is preparing a future Profile specifically on the prophecies related to December 21, 2012.
- ²⁴ “Deadline draws near for Nostradamus prophecy.”
- ²⁵ A separate 4-page Profile has been published on this subject: Marcia Montenegro, “Astrology” *Profile Notebook* (Arlington, Texas: Watchman Fellowship, Inc. 1994-2008). A complete *Profile Notebook* (over 350 pages) is available at www.watchman.org/notebook.htm.



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